

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3111

INFO AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 4845

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SOCI, NU

SUBJECT: TRENDS IN CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS DURING 1973

REF: MANAGUA A-72 OF DECEMBER 14, 1973

1. THE TREND OF CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES NOTED IN OUR 1972 REPORT ACCELERATED SHARPLY IN 1973. THE MANAGUA EARTHQUAKE DESTROYED CONSIDERABLE CHURCH PROPERTY BUT PROVIDED AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CHURCH TO MOVE OUT OF ITS SANCTUARIES AND BROADEN ITS CONTACTS WITH THE PEOPLE AND INCREASE ITS SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY. AS THE EMERGENCY ENDED AND NICARAGUANS INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY BEGAN TO EXPRESS THEIR HOPES FOR A "NEW NICARAGUA" AND TO MAKE NEW DAMANDS ON THE GOVERNMENT, THE CHURCH CONSISTENTLY AND FORCEFULLY TOOK THE SIDE OF THOSE PRESSING THE GOVERNMENT FOR CONCESSIONS, THEREBY PULLING WAWY FROM ITS PRE-EARTHQUAKE MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD POSITION.

2. THE "RECONSTRUCTION PERIOD" OF THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS HAS
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WITNESSED HEIGHTENED CHURCH ACTIVITY AND EVEN DEEPER INVOLVEMENT

IN POLITICAL MATTERS. ALTHOUGH THE CHURCH HAS ACTIVELY OPPOSED THE GOVERNMENT ON MANY ISSUES AND HAS IDENTIFIED ITSELF MORE CONSISTENTLY WITH OPPOSITION POSITIONS DURING THE PAST YEAR, THE GOVERNMENT'S REACTION HAS BEEN RELATIVELY MILD, WHILE IT CONTINUES TO ATTEMPT TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF ENJOYING THE CHURCH'S BLESSING. IN RECENT WEEKS, HOWEVER, THERE ARE SIGNS THAT THE PATIENCE OF GENERAL SOMOZA AND HIS GOVERNMENT MAY BE WEARING THIN. PRIVATELY, GON OFFICIALS HAVE COMPLAINED BITTERLY ABOUT CHURCH ACTIONS, WHILE CONFINING THEIR PUBLIC STATEMENTS TO SUBTLE AND OBLIQUE WARNINGS.

3. IN SUM, DURING 1973 THE CHURCH BECAME MORE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN POLITICS, DRIFTED TOWARD MORE CLEARLY DEFINED AND POLITICALLY CONTROVERSIAL POSITIONS, SKIRTED DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO A DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH THE GON AND INCLINED TOWARD CLOSER IDENTIFICATION WITH OPPOSITION AND REFORM GROUPS. A CHANGE IN THIS TREND APPEARS MOST UNLIKELY IN 1974, WHICH PROMISES TO BE A YEAR IN WHICH STRONG ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PRESSURES WILL BE FELT IN NICARAGUA. RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH WILL THEREFORE CONTINUE TO BE A DIFFICULT AND COMPLICATED PROBLEM FOR GENERAL SOMOZA BUT HE SHOULD BE ABLE TO COPE IF HE CAN KEEP HIS COOL AND EXERCISE HIS PROVEN POLITICAL AGILITY.

4. THE CHURCH DOES NOT ENDANGER ANY USG INTERESTS, TO THE CONTRARY, WE SHARE MANY GOALS, PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS IMPROVING THE LOT OF LOW INCOME GROUPS. WHILE WE MUTUALLY DESIRE TO AVOID CLOSE IDENTIFICATION, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE ACTIONS PARALLEL TO THOSE OF THE CHURCH IN MANY AREAS. A SERIOUS CONFRONTATION TO THE POINT OF THE GON TAKING REPRESSIVE MEASURES AGAINST THE CHURCH WOULD POSE A DILEMMA FOR THE USG, BUT WE ARE REASONABLY CONFIDENT THAT THIS WILL BE AVOIDED.

5. THE FOREGOING SUMMARIZES A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF TRENDS IN CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS DURING 1973 CONTAINED IN EMBASSY AIRGRAM A-72 DATED DECEMBER 14, 1973.
SHELTON

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